A LOWDEN SABBATH MORN

BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

ILLUSTRATED BY A. S. BOYD

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THE PRAYER [p. 16]

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BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
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TO

THE MEMORY OF

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY

THE ILLUSTRATOR

A Lowden Sabbath Morn

I

The clinkum-clank o' Sabbath bells
Noo to the hoastin' rookery swells,
Noo faintin' laigh in shady dells,
Sounds far an' near,
An' through the simmer kintry tells
Its tale o' cheer.

II

An' noo, to that melodious play,
A' deidly awn the quiet sway—
A' ken their solemn holiday,
Bestial an' human,
The singin' lintie on the brae,
The restin' plou'man.

III

He, mair than a' the lave o' men,
His week completit joys to ken;
Half-dressed, he daunders out an' in,
Perplext wi' leisure;
An' his raxt limbs he'll rax again
Wi' painfü' pleesure.

IV

The steerin' mither strang afit
Noo shoos the bairnies but a bit;
Noo cries them ben, their Sinday shüit
To scart upon them,
Or sweeties in their pouch to pit,
Wi' blessin's on them.

V

The lasses, clean frae tap to taes,
Are busked in crunklin' underclaes;
The gartened hose, the weel-filled stays,
The nakit shift,
A' bleached on bonny greens for days
An' white's the drift.

VI

An' noo to face the kirkward mile:
The guidman's hat o' dacent style,
The blackit shoon, we noo maun fyle
As white's the miller:
A waefü' peety tae, to spile
The warth o' siller.

VII

Our Marg'et, aye sae keen to crack,
Douce-stappin' in the stoury track,
Her emeralt goun a' kiltit back
Frae snawy coats,
White-ankled, leads the kirkward pack
Wi' Dauvit Groats.

VIII

A thocht ahint, in runkled breeks,
A' spiled wi' lyin' by for weeks,
The guidman follows closs, an' cleiks
The sonsie missis;
His sarious face at aince bespeaks
The day that this is.

IX

And aye an' while we nearer draw
To whaur the kirkton lies alaw,
Mair neebours, comin' saft an' slaw
Frae here an' there,
The thicker thrang the gate, an' caw
The stour in air.

X

But hark! the bells frae nearer clang;
To rowst the slaw, their sides they bang;
An' see! black coats a'ready thrang
The green kirkyaird;
And at the yett, the chestnuts spang
That brocht the laird.

XI

The solemn elders at the plate
Stand drinkin' deep the pride o' state:
The practised hands as gash an' great
As Lords o' Session;
The later named, a wee thing blate
In their expression.

XII

The prentit stanes that mark the deid,
Wi' lengthened lip, the sarious read;
Syne wag a moraleesin' heid,
An' then an' there
Their hirplin' practice an' their creed
Try hard to square.

XIII

It's here our Merren lang has lain,
A wee bewast the table-stane;
An' yon's the grave o' Sandy Blane;
An' further ower,
The mither's brithers, dacent men!
Lie a' the fower.

XIV

Here the guidman sall bide awee
To dwall amang the deid; to see
Auld faces clear in fancy's e'e;
Belike to hear
Auld voices fa'in saft an' slee
On fancy's ear.

XV

Thus, on the day o' solemn things,
The bell that in the steeple swings
To fauld a scaittered faim'ly rings
Its walcome screed;
An' just a wee thing nearer brings
The quick an' deid.

XVI

But noo the bell is ringin' in;
To tak their places, folk begin;
The minister himsel' will shüne
Be up the gate,
Filled fu' wi' clavers about sin
An' man's estate.

XVII

The tünes are up—*French*, to be shüre,
The faithfü' *French*, an' twa-three mair;
The auld prezentor, hoastin' sair,
Wales out the portions,
An' yirks the tüne into the air
Wi' queer contortions.

XVIII

Follows the prayer, the readin' next,
An' than the fisslin' for the text—
The twa-three last to find it, vext
But kind o' proud;
An' than the peppermints are raxed,
An' southernwood.

XIX

For noo's the time whan pows are seen
Nid-noddin' like a mandareen;
When tenty mithers stap a preen
In sleepin' weans;
An' nearly half the parochine
Forget their pains.

XX

There's just a waukrif' twa or three:
Thrawn commentautors sweer to 'gree,
Weans glowrin' at the bumlin' bee
On windie-glasses,
Or lads that tak a keek a-glee
At sonsie lasses.

XXI

Himsel', meanwhile, frae whaur he cocks
An' bobs belaw the soundin'-box,
The treesures of his words unlocks
Wi' prodigality,
An' deals some unco dingin' knocks
To infidality.

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Wi' sappy unction, hoo he burkes
The hopes o' men that trust in works,
Expounds the fau'ts o' ither kirks,
An' shaws the best o' them
No muckle better than mere Turks,
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XXIII

Bethankit! what a bonny creed!
What mair would ony Christian need?—
The braw words rumm'le ower his heid,
Nor steer the sleeper;
And in their restin' graves, the deid
Sleep aye the deeper.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It may be guessed by some that I had a certain parish in my eye, and this makes it proper I should add a word of disclamation. In my time there have been two ministers in that parish. Of the first I have a special reason to speak well, even had there been any to think ill. The second I have often met in private and long (in the due phrase) "sat under" in his church, and neither here nor there have I heard an unkind or ugly word upon his lips. The preacher of the text had thus no original in that particular parish; but when I was a boy he might have been observed in many others; he was then (like the schoolmaster) abroad; and by recent advices, it would seem he has not yet entirely disappeared.

ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTE

I am not certain of the particular parish Stevenson had in his mind when he wrote this poem, but I am certain that the description is typical of almost any Scottish rural parish, Lowden (that is, *Lothian*) or other. In illustrating the verses it has seemed to me, therefore, unnecessary to make portraits from any one locality. I fancy the writer looked back to the period of his boyhood and to the people he knew in more than one part of his native country, so I have tried to depict that period and that class of people as I remember them in various counties of his land and mine.

A. S. B.

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